

Proclamation 7238 of October 8, 1999

National Children's Day, 1999

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

The children of America are our most precious gift and our greatest responsibility. Their well-being is one of the greatest measures of our success as a society, and our ability to provide them with a loving, safe, and supportive environment will help determine the character of our Nation.

We can be proud of the progress we have made in creating such environments. To strengthen families and homes, we have provided tax relief to working families, raised the minimum wage, and enacted the Family and Medical Leave Act so that parents can take time off to be with a sick child or new baby without putting their jobs at risk. To give more children a healthy start in life, we have extended health care coverage to millions of previously uninsured children. To help America's youth reach their full potential, my Administration has urged the Congress to pass legislation to provide our students with a first-rate education by ensuring that they are educated by well-prepared teachers, in smaller classes, in modern and safe buildings, and with the latest in information technology.

On National Children's Day, however, we must also reflect soberly on how far we still have to go to make our communities safe and nurturing places for our children. One of our greatest challenges is to provide health coverage for the almost 11 million American children who are still uninsured. Many of these children are eligible for Medicaid or qualify for coverage under the Children's Health Insurance Programs that are now operating in every State across our Nation. Educators, policymakers, health care professionals, and business, community, and media leaders have a vital role to play in raising parents' awareness of their children's eligibility for this important coverage and making sure that these children are enrolled.

America must also confront the recent senseless acts of violence that have taken the lives and the innocence of so many young people. Places where they once felt safe—schools and churches and day care facilities—have been shaken by violence. Addressing this assault on our society's values and our children's future is a top priority of my Administration. We must work together—parents, students, educators, public officials, and religious, community, and industry leaders—to instill in our youth a sense of compassion, tolerance, and self-respect, so that they may find their way in a troubled world. We must also help them develop the strength to express their own anger and alienation with words, not weapons.

One of the most powerful tools we have in this endeavor is youth mentoring. A recent Department of Justice study showed that mentoring programs help young people resist violence and substance abuse, perform better academically, and interact more positively with their families and with other youth. Recognizing the value of mentoring programs, particularly to the well-being of millions of at-risk youth, my Administration announced earlier this year several public and private

initiatives to encourage mentoring, and we set aside \$14 million in grants for the Justice Department's Juvenile Mentoring Program.

Children bring so much hope, joy, and love to our lives; in return, we owe them our time, our attention, the power of our example, and the comfort of our concern. It is a fair trade, and one that enriches the lives of us all.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, WILLIAM J. CLINTON, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim October 10, 1999, as National Children's Day. I urge all Americans to express their love and appreciation for the children of our Nation on this day and on every day throughout the year. I invite Federal officials, local governments, communities, and all American families to join in observing this day with appropriate ceremonies and activities. I also urge all Americans to reflect upon the importance of children to our families, the importance of strong families to our children, and the importance of both to America.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this eighth day of October, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and ninety-nine, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-fourth.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

Proclamation 7239 of October 8, 1999

Columbus Day, 1999

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

Although Christopher Columbus' first voyage to the New World took place more than 500 years ago, the momentous changes it brought about still resonate today. His journey triggered a historic encounter between Europe and the native peoples of the New World; helped open new continents to exploration, trade, and development; established a reliable route to the Americas; and was a major milestone in the inexorable trend toward expansion and globalization.

Columbus could not have imagined the full impact of his arrival in 1492 or how his journey would shape human history. The zeal for trade that motivated the Spanish crown to fund Columbus' voyages still exists today as we work to strengthen our commercial ties with other nations and to compete in an increasingly global economy. Columbus' own passion for adventure survives as an integral part of our national character and heritage, reflected in our explorations of the oceans' depths and the outer reaches of our solar system. A son of Italy, Columbus opened the door to the New World for millions of people from across the globe who have followed their dreams to America. Today, Americans of Italian and Spanish descent can take special pride, not only in Columbus' historic achievements, but also in their own immeasurable contributions to our national life. From business to the arts, from government to academia, they have played an important part in advancing the peace and prosperity our country enjoys today.